

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at the Closing of the American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Nations Conference

November 5, 2009

Please, everybody have a seat. Let me first of all just thank Ken and the entire Department of the Interior staff for organizing just an extraordinary conference. I want to thank my Cabinet members and senior administration officials who participated today. I hear that Dr. Joe Medicine Crow was around, and so I want to give a shout-out to that Congressional Medal of Honor [Presidential Medal of Freedom]^{*} winner. Good to see you.

My understanding is, is that you had an extremely productive conference. I want to thank all of you for coming and for your efforts, and I want to give you my solemn guarantee that this is not the end of a process but a beginning of a process, and that we are going to follow up. We are going to follow up. Every single member of my team understands that this is a top priority for us. I want you to know that, as I said this morning, this is not something that we just give lip service to. And we are going to keep on working with you to make sure that the first Americans get the best possible chances in life in a way that's consistent with your extraordinary traditions and culture and values.

Shooting at Fort Hood Army Base in Texas

Now, I have to say, though, that beyond that, I had planned to make some broader remarks about the challenges that lay ahead for Native Americans, as well as collaboration with our administration, but as some of you might have heard, there has been a tragic shooting at the Fort Hood Army base in Texas. We don't yet know all the details at this moment; we will share them as we get them. What we do know is that a number of American soldiers have been killed and even more have been wounded in a horrific outburst of violence.

My immediate thoughts and prayers are with the wounded and with the families of the fallen, and with those who live and serve at Fort Hood. And these are men and women who have made the selfless and courageous decision to risk and at times give their lives to protect the rest of us on a daily basis. It's difficult enough when we lose these brave Americans in battles overseas. It is horrifying that they should come under fire at an Army base on American soil.

I've spoken to Secretary Gates and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, and I will continue to receive a constant stream of updates as new information comes in. We are working with the Pentagon, the FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security, all to ensure that Fort Hood is secure, and we will continue to support the community with the full resources of the Federal Government.

In the meantime, I would ask all Americans to keep the men and women of Fort Hood in your thoughts and prayers. We will make sure that we get answers to every single question about this horrible incident. And I want all of you to know that as Commander in Chief, there's no greater honor but also no greater responsibility for me than to make sure that the extraordinary men and women in uniform are properly cared for and that their safety and security when they are at home is provided for.

^{*} White House correction.

So we are going to stay on this. But I hope in the meantime that all of you recognize the scope of this tragedy and keep everybody in their thoughts and prayers.

Again, thank you for your participation here today. I am confident that this is going to be resulting in terrific work between this Government and your governments in the weeks, the months, and years to come. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:02 p.m. at the Department of the Interior. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of the Interior Kenneth L. Salazar; and Crow historian and author Joe Medicine Crow.

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